E L D E R

PAISIOS

1924 - 1994

SECULAR EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE

Η ΚΟΣΜΙΚΗ ΜΟΡΦΩΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΓΝΩΣΗ

RATIONALISM IN OUR TIMES

Ο ΟΡΘΟΛΟΓΙΣΜΟΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΠΟΧΗ ΜΑΣ

ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ

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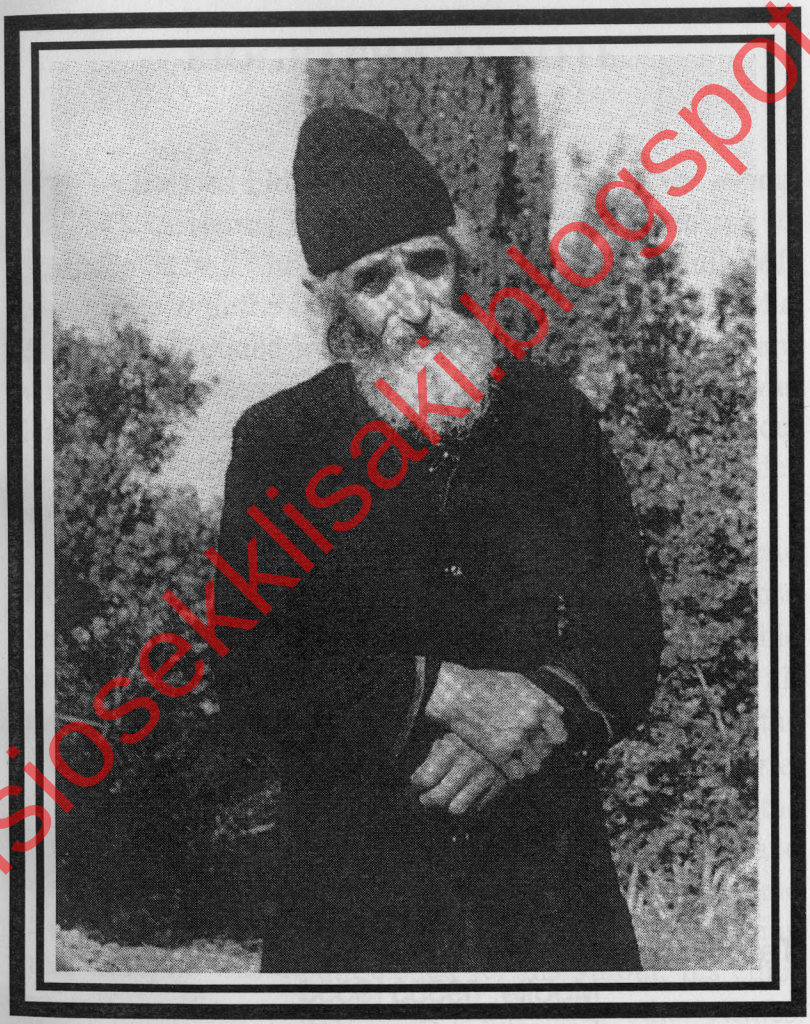
ELDER PAISIOS
(1924 – 1994)



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Secular Education and Knowledge

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ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΟ ΣΗΜΕΙΩΜΑ

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Blessed Elder Paisios, whose name in the world was Arsenios Eznepides, was born in *Pharasa* of Cappadocia on 25 July 1924. Shortly before his family left for Greece with the exchange of populations in 1924, the Elder was baptized by Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, who gave him his own name and foretold that "he was leaving a monk in his place." Upon arriving in Greece, his family settled in Konitsa of Epeirus where the Elder spent his childhood and young adult years.

From the time that he was a child, he lived an ascetic life, and was nourished by the lives of the Saints, whose feats he sought to imitate with great zeal and admirable precision. He practised unceasing prayer, cultivating all along the virtues of humility and love. He learned the trade of carpentry, wanting even in this aspect of his life, to imitate Christ. He fulfilled his military duty during the Guerilla War in Greece (1945-1949), serving for three and a half years in the Army as a wireless radio operator, and living ascetically even during this troubled time. During this time, he was distinguished for his valour, his ethos of self-sacrifice, moral integrity and many other virtues. Having fulfilled his duty to his country, he entered the

monastic life, which he had desired from his youth. Even as a layman, he had divine experiences, but the favour of the Lord, the *Theotokos* and the Saints intensified during his monastic life. He led an ascetic life on Mount Athos, in the Holy Monastery of Stomion in Konitsa, and on Mount Sinai in Egypt. He lived in obscurity, giving himself completely to God, and God in turn revealed him and gave him to the whole world. He guided, consoled, healed and granted peace to the multitudes of people who sought him. His sanctified soul overflowed with divine love and his saintly face radiated the divine Grace. All day long, he tirelessly gathered the human pain and imparted divine consolation.

He is the founder of the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki, Greece, which he also guided spiritually for twenty-eight years (1967-1994). It was to this Holy Monastery that he also entrusted and treasured the Holy Relics of his Godfather, Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, to whose memory a temple of Byzantine design was later erected

After suffering excruciating pains, which, as he used to say, benefited him more than the ascetic struggles of his entire life, he fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, in the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti, Thessaloniki. He was buried next to the Church of Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian.

May we have his blessing, Amen.

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ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ

PREFACE

When the Blessed Elder Paisios fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, he left behind a spiritual legacy: his teachings. Ever a simple monk, with only an elementary school education, but rich in the wisdom of God, the Elder emptied himself for the sake of others. His teaching was neither instruction, nor catechism. He lived the Gospel, and everything he taught flowed naturally from his way of life, whose main characteristic was love. He had formed himself according to the Gospel and, for this reason, it was his countenance that taught first and then his evangelical love and enlightened word. When he received people of all backgrounds, he did not simply listen patiently to the problems they confided in him, but with his holy simplicity and discernment, he would enter deeply into their heart and make their pain, anxiety and trouble his own. And, then, gradually, the miracle would take place: the transformation of the person. He used to say, "God performs a miracle when we wholeheartedly participate in the pain of our fellow human beings."

We saw with great joy the interest generated by the first books that circulated on the life and teachings of the Elder Paisios. Many spoke with admiration about the

answers they found to their questions, the solutions to their problems and the consolation to their grief. Our joy was even greater when people who had distanced themselves from the Mother Church became rightly concerned and changed their way of life. We often thought of the words of the hymnographer referring to Saint Basil the Great: *He lives, though he lies asleep in the Lord; he lives even among us, as one who speaks through his writings*. At the same time, we felt a compelling need to offer the very beneficial words of Elder Paisios – which we were recording with reverence from the very first steps of our Sisterhood, because they were so helpful to us – to our brothers and sisters in Christ who were so persistently asking for them.

The Good God provided that our *Hesychasterion*[1] owe its very existence to Elder Paisios. It was he who received the Episcopal approval of His Eminence, Synesios, the Metropolitan of Kassandreia, to establish our Monastery and who sought to find the appropriate location. And he did this because his noble and sensitive heart felt great gratitude to us for having taken care of him when we first met him, in 1966, during a hospital stay for a lung operation. From that time on, he felt that he was our big brother and had the obligation to "provide for his sisters," as he used to say, by establishing the Monastery. The first Sisters were settled at the Monastery in October of 1967. Elder Paisios spent two months in the *Hesychasterion* to help in the organization of the coenobitic life. After that, he would come out of Mount Athos, usually twice a year, to help the Sisterhood in their monastic way of life and he would assist each Sister individually in her spiritual struggle, with his God inspired advice and his personal experience. From the Holy Mountain, the "spiritual America", as he used to call it, he continued to help them through prayer and the letters he would send to each Sister individually or to the entire Sisterhood.

1. *Hesychasterion* (pl. *Hesychasteria)* in Greece and outside Mount Athos is a Coenobitic Monastery in which the local Bishop has the right to intervene in spiritual matters alone, but not in administrative matters.

In 1967, when Elder Paisios started establishing the foundations of coenobitic life in the *Hesychasterion*, from the simplest practical things to the most spiritual, he was forty-three years old. He had already attained the mature manhood *to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph 4:13) and he had the wisdom of an Elder. From the first days of coenobitic life, we discovered that his words were *the words of eternal life* (Jn 6:68) and that much of what he said should be taken as an axiom for our daily life. For this reason, we felt compelled to write down his words so that they would not to be forgotten and could serve as a secure rule for monastic life.

After we filled the first notebooks, we submitted them with considerable hesitation to his judgment. We hesitated because the Elder always emphasized the practical application; he did not want us just to gather material, "ammunitions", without putting his words into action. He always asked that we cultivate spiritually whatever we heard or read. Otherwise, he used to explain to us, there would be no benefit from all writings and notes just as there is no benefit to a state when it has a lot of armaments but lacks a trained army that will put them in use. Relenting to our persistent pleas, he agreed to see our notes and

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to complete or correct any points that we had not understood correctly.

The recording of his spiritual counsels continued all along the twenty-eight years that the Elder was overseeing and guiding the *Hesychasterion*. All meetings of the Elder with the entire Sisterhood or the Monastery Council and the Abbess were recorded – initially by notes taken down by the Sisters and later by tape recorder. Also recorded were conversations between the Elder and each Sister separately, who wrote down his words immediately after her conversation with him was over. When Elder Paisios realized what we were doing, he was rather irritated: "Why are you taking this down?" he asked. "Are you saving it for an emergency? You should put it into practice; apply it. Who knows what you are saying in these notes! Let me see." When we showed him a sample, the notes of one Sister, his expression changed; he was comforted and reassured, and with satisfaction exclaimed, "My goodness! She is like a tape recorder! She wrote it exactly as I said it!"

Our conversations with Elder Paisios were usually in the form of answers to our questions. In his private conversations with the Sisters, the questions mainly concerned their personal struggle. In meetings with the Monastery Council, which were scheduled in advance, subjects were raised that concerned us during his absence. These were put in the form of questions to be discussed when he came to visit. These questions covered all kinds of subjects: administrative, practical, spiritual, social, ecclesiastical, national and so forth. Finally, in meetings of the entire Sisterhood, besides the questions raised by the Sisters, the Elder discussed various other topics,

which simply came up on the spot, in the course of the conversation. The Elder would use every word and image he could for the spiritual benefit of the soul. The sound of an aeroplane flying over the Monastery, the noise of a machine, the chirping of a bird, the opening of a door or a simple phrase could set him talking for a long time about a serious matter. "I put everything to use," he used to say, "in order to reach Heaven. If we approach and work on all things spiritually, do you know how much spiritual profit can be made and what spiritual experience can be acquired?"

In his contacts with people, Father Paisios sought to prepare them for the Kingdom of Heaven by helping them to know the will of God and come closer to Him. Thus, he put to practice one of his favourite sayings that "the Good God looks after us first for our next life and then for this life." When he mentioned something about nature, science, art or everyday life, he was not interested in these subjects themselves, but used them as parables in order to awaken souls, and to help them grasp the deeper meaning of life and "cling" to God.

Because his manner of speech was simple, spontaneous and full of natural humour, he could tell the greatest truths in a plain and joyful manner. "I am making sunshine," he used to say; he meant that just like the sun is necessary for the flowers to bloom, a gentle pastoral approach enables the opening and healing of the soul. This was his enlightened pastoral care, which often prepared the soil of the soul to receive the austerity of his words about the unyielding and steadfast evangelical truth. In this way, even his most demanding word fell

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upon the human heart as a beneficial dew, cultivating it and bringing forth spiritual fruit.

After Elder Paisios fell asleep, the material that was collected during these twenty-eight years, together with the letters that he had sent to the *Hesychasterion* from the Holy Mountain, was classified according to subject so as to be used everyday in the life of the *Coenobium*. Events relating to his life were also recorded, including those of a divine nature, to which he referred not for bragging but for spiritual charity. "I am not telling you this," he used to say, "so that you can give me ribbons, and bravos. When I tell a war story from the time of my military service, or anything else, even a humorous example, I do so to make a point, so that you can grasp its deeper meaning. I don't like talking about useless things." In this manner he made himself a "spiritual blood donor". He wanted to fortify our anaemic faith, trigger our *philotimo*[2] and, being the noble man of God that he was, to cultivate the same nobility in us so that we can become by grace akin to God. "More and more I am emptying myself," he used to say, "and what is the result? In order to help you, I am forced to speak about myself; this is such a waste, a spiritual waste! Does it at least help you? I want you to know that every time I have to mention an incident from my life, how, for instance, the Providence of God has helped me on a certain occasion, something is being lost; I feel emptier. Does it at least bear fruit for you?"

2. *Philotimo*, according to Elder Paisios, is the reverent distillation of goodness, the love shown by humble people, from which every trace of self has been filtered out. Their hearts are full of gratitude towards God and their fellow men, and out of spiritual sensitivity and a sense of honour they try to repay the slightest good which others do for them.

Taking into account the difficult years that we are living through, we decided to publish all this material in a series of volumes starting with those topics that would be of general interest. Although many of these topics are part of everyday life, they must still be faced according to the Gospel; otherwise, the consequences for this life but also for our future, eternal life will be sorrowful or worse yet, devastating.

In making this decision, we were encouraged by an idea that Elder Paisios had entertained for years. He wanted to write "a book that would reach everybody, laity, monks and clergy." The idea had never materialized, since he gave all of his time to the many hurting souls who came every day to his *Kalyvi*. He gave himself completely to them, despite his limited and diminishing physical strength. "My news," he wrote in one of his letters "is many tired and suffering people. The people and their problems are ever increasing. Please pray that my physical strength not decrease. I need to provide a bit for myself, because I must be always ready to help, whether I can or not."

As already mentioned, the Elder usually responded to a variety of questions. For this reason, when faced with the task of integrating the various topics that he had addressed on different occasions, we decided to keep the dialogue form. Included in these dialogues, are excerpts from letters he had sent to the Monastery, extracts of books that he had written, as well as any additional material from his correspondence with other brothers and sisters in Christ, who entrusted us with their letters and with notes they had kept in their conversations with the Elder.

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The aim was to give each topic the fullest possible coverage. Every effort was also made to preserve, as much as possible, the immediacy and the grace of his spoken words. Some repetitive remarks that stressed the deeper meaning of his word and pierced many hearts were retained, as well as many exclamations, which were a natural part of his story telling, coming from a heart that was pulsating with great love for God and humankind.

References to monastic life are frequent, not only because Father Paisios was addressing nuns, but also because he wanted lay people to seek "the joy of Monasticism" that springs from total surrender to God. He believed that in this way they might be saved from the insecurity caused by a total dependence on the self. He wanted them to enjoy Heaven in this life.

With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man is the first volume of the series *Spiritual Counsels* of the Elder Paisios of Mount Athos. In order to make its content more useful to the reader, it was divided into four thematic parts. Each part is subdivided into chapters and every chapter into sections with the appropriate subheadings. Footnotes that explain terms from the spiritual and monastic life will be more than familiar to those brothers and sisters in Christ who are well acquainted with patristic texts. They have been added in order to assist readers who lack this background.

As Elder Paisios made frequent use of examples from science, art and other fields, as noted above, we ran the risk of not rendering correctly some of his verbal terminology or expressions. For this reason, before publication, we

invited the review of certain sections and chapters from brothers and sisters in Christ who specialise in the relevant areas. We wish to thank them for examining this material with great reverence for the Elder and for making the appropriate corrections. We would, of course, be grateful for any additional suggestions.

We pray that "the spiritual waste" offered by the Elder out of an abundance of love, will bear fruit in the simple and good willing hearts of his readers, and that they will be enriched with the wisdom of God that is *hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes* (Lk 10:21).

Amen.

Sunday of All Saints, June 14, 1998

The Abbess of the Holy *Hesychasterion*
Mother Philothei
and the Sisters in Christ with me

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PART THREE

THE SPIRIT OF GOD AND THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

"The inner purity of true human beings will beautify even their external aspect."

CHAPTER ONE

Secular Education and Knowledge

It Is the Pure in Heart
Who Are Truly Intelligent

When a person does not sharpen the mind thinking about God, but instead spends his time plotting and sharpening various schemes, he surrenders himself to the devil. It would have been better for him to have lost his mind completely; at least then he would have some extenuating circumstances on the Day of Judgment.

– Geronda, does simplicity differ from cunningness?

– Yes, as much as a jackal differs from a fox. If the jackal sees something and wants it, it will go after it right away and get it; it has guts. But the fox will first try its sly tricks and then go after its prey.

– Geronda, is cunningness a form of intelligence? Should one see it this way?

– Well, they seem similar, but if we examine ourselves, we will be able to tell the nature of the one from the nature of the other. We may refer to our recognition table. What are the graces of the Holy Spirit? Aren't they love,

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joy, peace and so forth?[1] Does what we call intelligence relate to these qualities? If it does not, then it has something satanic about it, it has the marks of the devil.

It is the pure in heart, those who have been cleansed of their passions, who are truly intelligent. True intelligence requires holiness of mind. If the mind does not become sanctified, intelligence will be good for nothing. Look at the journalists and politicians, for example. They are very bright, but because their mind is not holy, they will often say a great deal of nonsense with their clever remarks. And they do so out of their great intelligence! If man does not make the best out of his mind, the devil will. If man does not put his intelligence to good use, the devil will use it for something evil.

– You mean that if man does not make good use of his intelligence he grants the devil the right to intervene?

– If man does not make good use of his intelligence, rights are granted to the devil automatically. When we do not work spiritually, we adulterate the good and then evil is entirely of our making; the devil has nothing to do with it. If a smart person, for example, will not use his mind, he will become lazy. If he will not put his mind to work, what use is his intelligence?

– Can someone who is intelligent but suffers from various passions, have correct judgement?

– First of all, he must be careful not to trust his mind, because, if he is indeed a spiritual man, he will be deceived; and if he is a worldly man he will go mad. He should not trust his thoughts. He must ask around and seek advice so that he may sanctify his mind. In general, we must seek

1. Cf. Gal 5:22-23.

to sanctify everything we have. When our mind becomes holy, discernment follows. Without holiness, intelligence cannot lead to spiritual discernment. On the other hand, a simpleton may mistake a deceived man for a saint and an effeminate person for a pious soul. But when a bright person is cleansed of his passions, he becomes especially discerning.

– Geronda, how does that happen?

– In order to purify an intelligent mind, we must not accept any "telegrams" from the devil, nor have crafty, wily thoughts; instead, our mind must work with goodness and simplicity. This is how we come to think clearly, through divine illumination, and when this happens, we can look into the hearts of others and not come to conclusions using human criteria.

– Geronda, is discernment related to knowledge?

– Discernment comes from divine enlightenment. We may be spending most of our time reading the Fathers of the Church, having correct knowledge of certain things, striving spiritually and praying, and yet possess no discernment. Discernment comes from divine enlightenment, and that is an entirely different matter.

– Was the world better in the old days, Geronda?

– I would not say that it was better, but that people in the past had simplicity and good thoughts. Today people see everything with guile, because they measure everything only with their mind. The so-called European spirit has done a lot of damage; it has really ruined so many people. You see, with everybody being more or less educated today and able to communicate better, it would have been easy for us to be in a very good spiritual state. But instead, what people are being taught is atheism, and all kinds of

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satanic ideas, and so all our education has become worthless and it's difficult to understand each other. In the old days, it was difficult to relate to someone if he were not a pious person or lacked education. I remember once how a monk became scandalized when he heard the name of Gregory, Pope of Rome,[2] mentioned at the Presanctified Divine Liturgy. He thought they were commemorating the Pope of Rome! "I never expected it," he said. "You have become papists!" And he walked out of the Church. Do you see what ignorance can cause? Ignorance is a dreadful thing. The greatest harm is done by people who have a sound piety but lack a sound mind. Not being able to discern correctly, they create all kinds of problems.

Without Divine Illumination Knowledge Ends in Disaster

If people would only put the brakes on their speeding minds, not only would their mind find rest, but it would be more receptive to divine Grace. Without divine illumination, knowledge ends in disaster. Those who strive and labour for their spiritual life, have their mind illumined by God; they receive divine illumination, divine experiences, and these give them foresight, so that they don't see things only through their own understanding. A short-sighted person sees clearly the things that are close, but not what is far away. As for a person with normal vision, well, he may be able to see a bit farther, but that too is not an

2. Saint Gregory the *Dialogos*, Pope of Rome (540-604), is one of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. He wrote four books of dialogues and that is why he is called *Dialogos*. His feast day is celebrated on March 12.

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prived of divine illumination, because they foolishly exchange a sunny place for a sunless one. This is why they suffer from spiritual colds and other such ailments. If man is not purified, if divine illumination does not come to him, no matter how sound his human knowledge might be, it will remain, as I see it, nothing more than rationalism. If there is no divine illumination, whatever they may write or say will not help others. Consider, for example, the Psalter, written with divine inspiration, what profound meanings it contains! Gather together, if you want, all the theologians and all the philologists of the world, and you will see that they are not able to compose one Psalm with such spiritual depth. David was illiterate, but you can see clearly how he was guided by the spirit of God.

The Church is suffering today because divine illumination is missing, and each person understands things as he wishes. The human element gets involved, passions are aroused, and the devil comes in and roams all over. This is why people who are governed by their passions should not seek to govern.

– In other words, Geronda, should people constantly seek guidance and illumination from God?

– Yes, because otherwise, the solutions that they will give to their problems, will be nothing else than the work of their mind. And this will only end up in confusion. Conferences, symposia … take place all the time. And the sad thing is that most of these people have no idea who they really are. You see, nothing can compare to our knowledge of our true self; knowledge of all other kinds

is useless when we do not know who we are. To recognize our true self, and do so with humility, will bring recognition by others. If some people could realize who they really are, the sorry state of their soul, they would have no words to speak to anyone, nothing to say.

Once, someone complained to me, "There isn't a single Orthodox to represent Orthodoxy in conferences abroad." He went on and on, as if it were the end of the world. I said to him, "When God asked Prophet Elijah, 'What are you doing here in Horeb Elijah?'[3] he answered, 'I am the only one left and they seek my life...' And God replied, 'There are seven thousand people in Israel, who have not bowed to worship Baal.' Do you see how the Prophet felt alone even though there were seven thousand faithful there? You, likewise, are despairing despite the existence of so many faithful. What do you think our own *Pantocrator*[4] is? Is He like the *Pantocrator* on a dome of a Church cracked by an earthquake, a mere mosaic that we are trying to save from collapse with the aid of the Archaeological Service?" "In America," he replied, "there is no one." "But I have gotten to know many faithful from America," I answered. "Yes," he told me, "but the Catholics are always plotting against us." "What I know is that many Catholics are disappointed with Papism and are returning to Orthodoxy," I countered. "Isn't it true that when Patriarch Demetrios[5] went to America many Catholics themselves were saying, 'The Patriarch is

3. Cf. I Kg 19:13-18 (LXX: III Kg 19:13-18).

4. *Pantocrator* is used exclusively of Jesus Christ and means the Ruler and Redeemer of the universe. An icon of Christ *Pantocrator* is usually painted at the highest point of the Church, which is at the top of the main dome.

5. He was Oecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (1972-1991).

a true Christian while the Pope is a 'merchant' '? Were not these Catholics speaking out of indignation? Why, then, are you saying that Catholics are always plotting to enter Orthodoxy to adulterate it ...? What about God? Where is He in all this? Or, do you think the devil can prosper unhindered?"

Unfortunately, western rationalism has had its influence on certain Eastern Orthodox leaders, who are members of the Eastern Orthodox Church only in body. In spirit, they really belong to the West, which they consider to "reign" over the secular world. But if they were to view the West spiritually, to see it in the light of the East, in the light of Christ, then, they would be able to discern its spiritual twilight. For the light of the intelligible Sun, the light of Christ Himself is disappearing from the West and a deep darkness is slowly setting in. All these gatherings and conferences[6] are the work of the evil one; the leaders are engaging in endless discussions on issues that need no discussion, issues that even the Holy Fathers never addressed in the past. All these are meant to confuse and scandalize the faithful and drive some of them to heresies and others to schisms, so that he can gain more ground. Ah! The misery and confusion they bring to people!

And why is that? It all starts with neglecting one's spiritual work; then comes the conviction that one is really a spiritual person and finally he ends up saying all sorts of nonsense. A child does not know much, but with the natural purity of its mind, it always finds the right thing to

6. In this statement the Elder does not mean to include all conferences, but only those convened to discuss matters that have already been settled by the Church, or that have been determined by the Holy Fathers or that do not need to be discussed.

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say to you. By contrast, a highly educated person, whose mind is clouded by demonic influence, can tell you the most blasphemous things.

The person, who constantly sharpens his mind with knowledge, but lives a life apart from God, will eventually turn his mind into a double-edged sword. With the one side of the sword, he will be slowly putting himself to the slaughter, while with the other, he will be slicing people to pieces with all kinds of absolute human views, sharpened by his unyielding mind. When human knowledge becomes sanctified, it can help others. But if it lacks holiness, then it's only a human construct; it is the work of a mind ruled by secular reason. When the mind is not holy, it resembles an iron rod that has no magnetic power. Even though it strikes other metals to weld them together, it can only bend them out of shape; it has no welding power whatsoever.

This is the sad state of today's world. People see everything through the prism of cold logic. This kind of logic is really destructive. Doesn't the Apostle Paul write, *Knowledge puffs up*?[7] If we lack divine illumination, all the knowledge in the world will be useless to us, and will end in disaster.

Science and Spiritual Life

Evil starts when the mind concentrates only on science and is totally separated from God. This is why it is difficult for people who think this way to find inner peace and balance. By contrast, when the mind revolves

7. I Cor 8:1.

around God, and is illumined and sanctified, science is used both for our spiritual edification and for the benefit of the world.

– Do you mean to say, Geronda, that science does not help people?

– Science can be of great help, but it can also muddle the mind greatly. I have met souls who possessed great lucidity even though their education was limited. If those who have muddled their mind with science manage to clarify it with the Grace of God, then, naturally, they will have more tools for their work. But if these tools are not sanctified, if their knowledge lacks holiness, then it will be used only for secular work and not for spiritual work. Our tools can be sanctified very quickly if we have the right kind of concern. Scientists and educated people who give precedence to their inner formation, to the edification of the soul, and bring their secular education to the service of spiritual growth, they will experience a rapid spiritual transformation. If they also lead spiritual lives, they will be able to help many people positively, by removing from their hearts the anxiety of hell and opening the way for heavenly joy. There are people of God who do not have as many academic degrees as others, but they can help people more, because they are full of divine Grace rather than diplomas. The world is so filled with sin that what we need the most is people given to prayer and to living a spiritual life. All these books and papers are paper money, valuable only if there are gold reserves in our bank, if our lives are spiritual through and through. And so we must drill into the "mine" of the soul, for otherwise science and education will be worth nothing.

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I remember an elderly monk at Esphigmenou Monastery on Mount Athos, who was so simple, that he thought "Ascension" was the name of a woman Saint. He prayed to her on his *komboschoini*, "Saint of God, intercede for us!" Once, he had to feed a sick Brother in the infirmary and had nothing to offer him. He immediately went down the stairs, opened a window overlooking the sea, stretched his arms out and said, "Ascension, my Saint, give me a little fish for the Brother." And right away, as if by miracle, a big fish jumped out of the sea and into his hands. The others who saw him were astonished, but he simply looked at them smiling, as if he were saying, "What's so strange about what you've just seen?" And then look at us. We may know everything about the life and martyrdom of the Saints, or about when and how the Ascension took place and yet, we cannot even catch a tiny little fish! These are the strange and paradoxical things of the spiritual life, which the reasoning of those intellectuals that are centred on themselves and not on God, cannot explain, because their knowledge is of this world and sterile; their spirit is ill with secularism and their mind void of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit Does Not Need Engines to Descend

The word of the mind does not transform the soul, because it is of flesh. The word of God, born of the Holy Spirit, has divine energy and transforms the soul. The Holy Spirit does not need engines to descend. This is why Theology has nothing to do with a sterile scientific spirit. The Holy Spirit descends on His own volition, when He finds the right spiritual preconditions in man. And these

conditions exist when we remove the rust from our spiritual cables, and become good conductors for the spiritual current of divine illumination. It is then that we can become a spiritual scientist, a theologian. By "theologian", I mean those theologians who have theological reserves, whose degree has value, not those who only carry a diploma as worthless as the paper money we had during the German Occupation.

Many times the mind labours for years to learn one or two foreign languages, and today most people will speak at least one foreign language. Yet these languages bear no relationship to the languages of the Holy Pentecost, and for this reason the society in which we live is the greatest Babel ever. It is a great evil when we theologize with our mind alone, as if our mind is the Holy Spirit. The name for this is "*encephalology*", and its offspring is Babel. Whereas with true Theology, there are many languages, many charismata, but they are all in agreement because their Leader is the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, and they are really tongues of fire.

– Geronda, the hymn says, *All things are provided by the Holy Spirit.*[8]

– Yes, the Holy Spirit provides, but only where there is room for Him to enter. Otherwise, He will not be able to provide. The words of a humble soul with spiritual experiences, spoken with pain from the depths of his heart, have much greater value than the fancy philological talk of a man who speaks without the heart, firing the words the one after the other from his trained tongue, but being incap-

8. A Stichero Idiomelo for the Feast of Pentecost. The Stichera Idiomela are chanted with verses from the Psalms and their own particular melody.

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able of touching other souls. For such words are spoken by a tongue of flesh and not a fiery tongue of Pentecost.

Let Us Sanctify Knowledge

Education and knowledge are good things, but if they are not sanctified, they are a waste and lead to disaster. Some university students arrived at my *Kalyvi* one day, loaded with books. They said, "Geronda, we are here to discuss the Old Testament with you. God permits knowledge, doesn't He?" "What kind of knowledge do you mean?" I asked them. "Knowledge acquired with the mind?" "Yes," they answered. "This kind of knowledge," I replied, "will take you up to the moon, but will not lead you to God." It is good to have the intellectual powers that take man to the moon costing billions of dollars in fuel expenses and so on, but it is better to have the spiritual powers that raise man to God, his ultimate destination, with only a bit of fuel, a mere dried piece of bread.

Once, I asked an American who visited me at the *Kalyvi*, "What has this great nation of yours accomplished?" "We went to the moon," he replied. "How far is that?" I continued. "Let's say it's about half a million kilometres away," he responded. "How many millions of dollars did you spend to get there?" I asked next. "Since 1950," he told me, "we have spent rivers of dollars." "Did you get to God? How far is He?" I added. "God," he said, "is very, very far." "Well," I replied, "it only takes us a dry piece of bread to get to Him!"

Natural knowledge helps us acquire spiritual knowledge. But when man remains at the level of natural knowledge, he is confined to nature and does not reach Heaven.

In other words, he remains on the earthly paradise, which was watered by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, enjoying beautiful nature with all its animals, but does not ascend to the heavenly Paradise to rejoice with the Angels and the Saints. But in order to reach the heavenly Paradise, we need to have faith in the Landlord of Paradise, to love Him, realize how sinful we are, and be humbled. In this way, we will come to know Him, to converse with Him in prayer, and praise Him for His help but also for the ways in which He is testing us.

– Geronda, does a person who finds peace in prostrations, fasting, asceticism, and so on, still need to study the dogmatic writings of the Church Fathers, theology?

– A basic education is actually a very helpful tool. But one should not seek knowledge in order to help or impress others with clever remarks; he should get an education in order to help himself. If we make the effort to sanctify whatever God may have given us, the light of Grace will come and illuminate our minds. It's in that light that we will find all the dogmatics and theology that we need; there we will experience the mysteries of God. But we should also realize that other people may have a simple disposition and do not wish to learn more, being content with anything that God may give them.

– What should we make of the fact that though we live in a Monastery, we still desire the knowledge of the world?

– What this means is that we lack true knowledge. *And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*[9] When man is humbled and illumined, then his mind

9. Jn 8:32.

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and its reasoning powers are rendered holy, whereas, before, they worked only in a carnal way – their energy was of the flesh. An unlettered man who, out of egoism, overlooks his ignorance and tries to interpret the doctrines of the faith, to read the Apocalypse and the writings of the Holy Fathers, will certainly become confused, and will end up losing his faith. God's Grace will abandon him, because he acted out of egoism. You see, humility helps in everything we do; it provides the strength we need. The wisest thing I may think of, the wisest solution to a problem I may discover, will be sheer nonsense, if it contains egoism; whereas humility will always bring wisdom. This is why we must struggle with *philotimo* and much humility. Otherwise, instead of doing us good, our efforts will bring the opposite result. When our mind becomes muddled and we end up saying blasphemous things, it's because we acted with egoism. This is something that we cannot control. Even an educated man runs the risk of being harmed, when attempting to interpret the dogmas of the Church, let alone an uneducated person who tries to penetrate into the patristic spirit without having reached a spiritual state! For, if he had reached even a low level in the spiritual state, he would not have tried in the first place. He would have thought, "If I should need something, God will send His light. In the meantime, let me practice the many things I already understand. That should keep me busy!"

– In other words, Geronda, lack of humility and piety leads people to misinterpret the Gospel?

– That's right; because, when humility is missing, the interpretations we are likely to give are the product of logical reasoning alone; they lack divine illumination.

– When we do not understand something, should we leave it for later?

– Yes. We must say, "It says something good here, but I do not understand it." This is exactly what I did. When I was reading the Gospel, as a young man, and did not understand something, I did not try to interpret it. I would say to myself, "It says something good here, but I do not understand it." Later, I would realize that, when an interpretation was needed, it would come to me instantly. But then again I would say, "Let me ask someone else how this should be interpreted." It would turn out to be exactly the way I had understood it. It is great impudence for someone to try to interpret the Gospel, especially if he does not understand it. This is why, when you study the Gospel, you should not attempt to interpret it with your mind; instead, cultivate good thoughts until divine illumination brings you discernment. Things will then become clear on their own, with no effort from you.

– Can we understand something at a deeper level when we have a better spiritual state?

– Not at a deeper level. One divine truth has many divine meanings. Some may be understood now and some later. A person may study for years and learn a lot, and yet he may not be able to grasp the meaning of the Gospel. By contrast, someone else who does not study much, but has humility and an ascetic spirit, can come to a true understanding because his mind is illumined by God. Moreover, if we wish to study more, our motive may be vainglory or pleasure, not unlike that of a person who watches wrestling and is constantly checking his watch because he wants to catch as many games as possible. You see, he is enjoying wrestling but does not wish to learn anything

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about it. Not only will he never become a wrestler but he will remain nothing more than a spectator.

– Geronda, people often call the educated person a "cultivated person". Is this always true?

– When we say that someone is a "cultivated person" we mean that he is a person who is cultivated spiritually, a spiritually mature person. I have noticed that among uneducated people there are some who are very proud and others who are very humble. It's the same among the educated; some are very proud and others are very humble. In other words, what makes the difference is how cultivated one is in spiritual terms. This is why Saint Basil the Great says, "The most important thing is to hold a high position and have a humble disposition." A person who has reached an important position in life may be justified to feel a bit proud about it; but someone who has not, has no excuse. What really matters is that we are cultivated within. If in addition to that, one is also educated and has a humble disposition, then, this is the best of all worlds. But to not be highly educated and yet to think highly of ourselves, well … that's inexcusable.

"Knowledge Puffs Up"[10]

When only the outer man is educated, education proves to be harmful, because it gives rise to an inflated idea of self. This idea then becomes a barrier that prevents the Grace of God from coming close to us. But when we put away our false view of self-importance, then God, Who is a Benevolent and Generous Father, will enrich us with

10. I Cor 8:2.

His divine and luminous ideas. Those, by contrast, who are not willing to give up their sense of self-importance, certainly have a brain and a body but they lack the Grace of God, the Holy Spirit. In other words, there is a danger that too much knowledge may inflate the head and turn it into an air balloon that may either explode in mid air (from schizophrenia) or break up into pieces (from pride). This is the reason why knowledge should proceed with fear of God and in alignment with action; it should be balanced. When these elements are missing, knowledge will only cause harm.

When egoism takes charge and I start talking so that others will admire my reasoning skills, then spiritual laws go into effect that help me come to my senses. But when this happens constantly, the outcome is not good. If a small piece of hair falls into the eye, it will cause a minor irritation. But if it happens all the time, the irritation will be serious. This is what happens with spiritual irritation. When we are smart and do our work with ease, we must fall apart before God, thanking Him day and night that He has given us this ability, and we can work without getting tired. How could we not do that?

– Geronda, what if a person believes that he is not capable of achieving anything?

– Then that person is being tempted by the devil from the opposite side. The camel was once asked, "Do you like going uphill better than going downhill?" And the camel answered, "Why, can't I go on the straight and level path?"

Those who happen to have a weak mind fare better. God has given us brains so that we may have a better life. But look what we have done with this gift. One day we

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will have to answer to Him. God's providence is active everywhere! Those who are not very bright can be happy here and happier in the next life, while those who are very bright have nothing but problems.

– Geronda, will the mentally impaired be well in the next life? Will they have a normal mind?

– No matter how much mind one carries, lots of it or just a small amount, in the end it will turn into pulp. When it reaches Heaven the mind will become intellect.[11] In Heaven, the theologian Saints and the mentally impaired will not differ in their knowledge of God. God may even be more generous to the latter, because they were deprived of so many things in this life.

We Must Put Our Mind to Good Use

– Why then, Geronda, do you often say that education is an advantage in the monastic life?

– Look, an educated person may take a work of the Fathers and, with only a little effort make great progress, because for him the text is easy to understand. An uneducated person, by contrast, especially if he is not pious, will have a hard time with it. He needs to have lived a spiritual life and have some experience of divine things, so that through them, he can understand what he is reading. Now take the educated person. All he needs to advance is a little effort, provided that his mind does its job and does not get absorbed in theory. I am not, however, suggesting that he should try to know the mysteries of God by his mind.

11. The Elder is distinguishing here between a natural mind (*myalo*) and a spiritual mind (*nous*).

– In other words, Geronda, we should use our mind against the passions?

– Not only that, but more generally, we should take notice of God's beneficence and of the universe all around us and give Him thanks and praise. You see, it was Abraham that first sought God, not the other way around.

– What do you mean?

– Abraham's father was a pagan; he worshipped idols. But Abraham saw the universe and was puzzled that his people were worshipping inanimate idols. So he put his mind to work: "It's not possible," he thought "that these soulless things, these pieces of wood are divine, and creators of this universe. Who made the sky, the stars and the sun? I must find the true God and once I do, I will believe and worship only Him." Then God came and revealed Himself to Abraham and said, *Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.*[12] And He led him to Hebron and made him a favourite son. You see an educated person will advance even without piety; all that he needs is a little humility and to engage in spiritual work. Take for instance, the time that I served in radio communications in the army. When I got there, I realized that some codes were written in English. Those who were educated and knew some English could understand them right away, but the rest of us had difficulty. The same was true of the theoretical subjects we were being taught. The educated among us understood them readily, because they had the foundation, but the rest of us again had a hard time following.

12. Gen 12:1.

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We must get to know the beneficence of God; we must understand what has been given to us. Why did God give us a mind? So that we may examine, study and observe ourselves and everything around us. God did not give us a mind so that we may constantly spend our time figuring out how to find the fastest means of transportation from one country to another. He gave us a mind because He wants us to preoccupy ourselves with the most important thing: how to reach our true destination, how to get close to God, to what is our one true country, Paradise.

How much good has God done for the people of ancient Israel! What signs! What events! But when Moses was late in coming down from Mount Sinai with the tablets and the Ten Commandments, the people gave their golden jewellery to make a golden image of a calf and went on to worship it.[13] It's difficult to find people with a calf's mind in our days. This is why an educated man who cannot tell right from wrong cannot be justified. God gave us a mind so that we can search for our Creator. The Europeans have bewildered the human mind; they are confused and going downhill because they have taken God out of their lives.

Then there are those who, while they have all the advantages to get ahead – a good and sharp mind and so on – fail to pay attention to what you tell them. The moment you try to give them a hint, they interrupt you, "Yes, I understand," they say, and then rush to complete your sentence. Among the young men who come to the Holy Mountain, there are some who are very intelligent. They seem to understand everything you tell them, but

13. Ex 32:1-6.

in reality they get nothing, because they are not paying attention. Those who are not as bright actually fare better since they pay attention, they wait prudently to hear what you have to say next, and this way they retain what they hear. Then, there are those who understand a lot, collect pieces of advice from here and there, but in the end, do nothing at all with it. They scatter and waste the mind that God has given them. They are full of pride, and they don't allow the Grace of God to come over them. By contrast, others who are not as bright come and humble themselves. "I am not very smart," they tell me, "do you mind repeating what you said?" And once they understand, they try to put the advice you give them to practice. That is why they are filled with Grace and they make progress in their spiritual life. A humble person is usually well-learned; but an egoist finds it so hard to humble himself by asking a question, that he never learns anything. Saint Arsenios the Great was the most educated man in the Byzantine Empire. The Emperor Theodosios the Great had him as a tutor to his children, Arkadios and Honorios. But when he went to the desert to become a monk, he sat at the feet of Abba Macarios, who was illiterate, and Arsenios used to say of him, "I do not know even the alphabet of this man"![14]

– Geronda, how can we avoid examining everything only with our mind?

– Man has to make good use of his mind. He must put it to work for the grandeur of God, to seek God. He must not make his mind a god. Those who are bright should be advanced spiritually. One quick look and they understand. When we make good use of our mind, we can be of

14. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Abba Arsenios, p. 8:6.

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great help to others; otherwise, we can cause them great pain. I have in mind some cases among lay people.

I once knew a little boy who had three little brothers. They lost their father, and their mother got married again. The little orphans never had any love either from their mother or their step father. So this little boy grew up and he opened a store and he started making a living. One day he heard that someone died and left behind three orphans. He felt compassion for the children and said to the widow, "Will you marry me and live with me like a sister to protect these children?" She accepted and now they are living together a very spiritual life, reading the Lives of the Saints, the *Philokalia* and visiting Monasteries. They also have a Spiritual Father who guides them. This young man had the right thought and did the right thing, and thus he received divine Grace. Otherwise, the devil would have told him, "This is your chance to make these orphans suffer as you suffered when you were a child." He did not look to take revenge with malice, but "retaliated" with kindness. Some people will use their mind for good and invent good things; others, prompted by the devil, put them to work in order to destroy and harm.

We can see this in the case of Cain and Abel.[15] Did God create Abel one way and Cain another? No; but Abel took the mind that God gave him and used it the right way. He thought, "God has given me an entire flock; how can I deny Him a little lamb?" So he goes and kills the best lamb he had and offered it as a sacrifice to God. Now, Cain took wheat filled with straw and offered it to God. One of them offered to God the best lamb, while

15. Gen 4:2-15.

the other offered useless straw. Fine! Let's say that you do not want to offer a lamb; offer at least some clean and pure wheat. Well, that's not what he does, unfortunately. He takes wheat and straw and puts it on the fire. Compare the two offerings! God was pleased with Abel's sacrifice. So Cain became jealous and killed his brother. And then God took Abel with Him in Paradise, while Cain was left wandering in the woods like a wild beast. Of course, God gave both of them the same freedom, but only Abel used it the right way.

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CHAPTER TWO

Rationalism in Our Times

Logic and Spiritual Life

Geronda, what is the place of reason and logic in the spiritual life?

– Which logic are you talking about? If you mean secular logic, then this kind of logic[1] has no place at all in the spiritual life. Angels and Saints, enter through our windows, we can see them, talk with them, and then they leave… There is no way that one can explain this logically. Today, increased knowledge and trust in logic has, unfortunately, shaken our faith to its foundations and filled our souls with question marks and doubts. This is why we don't have miracles anymore, because a miracle cannot be explained logically, it can only be experienced. But faith in God will bring down divine power and overturn all human expectations. It will perform miracles, resurrect the dead and astonish science. From the outside, all things pertaining to the spiritual life seem upside down.

1. When the Elder refers to logic and reproaches it, he does not mean by this term the gift of reason with which God has honoured human beings, but rather rationalism, or, as he calls it "afflicted reason", the logic that is void of faith in God, rejects divine Providence and denies the possibility of miracles.

Indeed, the mysteries of God will be impossible to know and will appear strange and contrary to nature as long as we don't overturn our secular mindset and see everything with spiritual eyes. Those who believe that they can come to know God's mysteries through mere scientific theory, without a spiritual life, resemble a fool who thinks he can look through a telescope and see Paradise.

Logic is very harmful when we use it to scrutinize the divine, the mysteries and the miracles. Logic drove the Roman Catholics, as I have heard, to put the Holy Communion through chemical tests to determine if it is the actual Body and Blood of Christ! Now think of the Saints who had so much faith that they could often see flesh and blood on the Holy Communion spoon. Pretty soon, they will be putting the Saints through an X-ray machine to establish their sainthood! Thus, the Catholics got rid of the Holy Spirit, put logic in its place and now spend their time with "white magic". I said to a Catholic, a man with a good disposition, who came to see me and was in tears, "Among the most important differences that we have with you, is that you put the mind first, whereas we put faith. You have developed rationalism and, in general, you stress the human factor. This way you limit the power of God, because you put divine Grace aside. You put a preservative in Holy Water to keep it from spoiling. We, on the other hand, pour Holy Water on spoiled things and they become fresh again. We believe in Grace that sanctifies, and for this reason Holy Water remains unspoiled for two hundred years, five hundred years; it never spoils."

– In other words, Geronda, what has happened is that logic and rationalism have taken precedence over God?

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– Could it be that what we are talking about is not logic but pride? Because you see, this kind of logic is actually impaired rather than sound reason. Pride is reason that is impaired, full of egoism, harbouring demons. When this sort of logic is involved in our actions, we grant rights to the devil to intervene.

– Geronda, when a spiritual person is confronting temptation, can't they make use of logic?

– In that case, they should do what is humanly possible, and where something is not in their power, they should leave it to God. There are some people, who will try to grasp everything only with their mind, for example, those who say the Jesus Prayer silently, only with their mind. They put pressure on their mind to concentrate and they end up getting a headache. If I were to deal this way with the problems I have to face daily, do you think that I would be able to manage? I just do what is humanly possible and leave the rest to God. I say to myself, "God will show me, He will enlighten me and I will know what to do." You will hear many people complain, "How will I get this done and how will I manage to finish this or that..." The smallest problem gives them a headache. If we try to solve problems using nothing else but our logic, we will end up quite confused. In each and every one of our actions, God must take the lead. Everything we do, we must do trusting God, for otherwise we will be full of anxiety, our mind will get overwhelmed and our soul will be miserable.

– Geronda, you have said that you never reach the point of mental exhaustion. How is that possible?

– Yes, this is true and it happens because I do not handle problems with my mind. If I get a headache, I get it

because of a cold or low blood pressure. And I have to deal with so many things! Everyday people come to me with their problems and their pain. I also think of those who came before with their various problems, the sick, and so on. And if someone should get well, they don't let me know, so that I could rejoice a little... I go on worrying about them too.

– Geronda, what's the proper way for a monk or nun to deal with their thoughts, so that they will not be exhausted by logic?

– They should put their thoughts in order, using spiritual rather than secular logic. They should turn the dial to the spiritual "frequency", and think and approach everything spiritually. Even a layperson, who leads a spiritual life, should have no use for secular logic. This way of thinking is right only for good persons who have no faith.

– Geronda, what do you mean by approaching everything spiritually?

– A spiritual approach is when you enjoy the opposite of what secular people enjoy; for example, when you are pleased by the fact that people are not paying any attention to you. If we want to enter the spiritual realm, we must move in the opposite direction from the one people in the world would expect us to move. Is it money you want? You should give it all away, including your wallet. Is it a throne you are looking for? Be prepared to sit humbly on a stool.

– How about us, Geronda, what's our percentile when it comes to logic?

– You must be released from the bonds of logic. I pray that this will happen out of love, the divine madness of love. You see, Christians who trust everything to

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rationalism, that is to proud logic, are no better off than the patients of Lembeti.[2]

We Suffer From Secular Logic

– Geronda, when I feel my heart become hard like a stone, what should I do?

– Your problem is not a hard heart but a mind-driven heart. Your entire heart has been taken over by your mind and is now at its service. But there is still a chance for your heart to go back.

– How?

– Each day you must read a canon from the *Theotokarion*.[3] If you want your heart to get back in shape, that's the best medicine. You do have a heart, but it has been clouded by logic. You are following the European "rubrics", the European way of thinking. You want to be true to form and do everything right. If you were a European clerk, you would be exemplary, always on time, impeccable in your duties, an example to follow. If you were to apply this integrity to spiritual matters, you would certainly make great spiritual strides and reach Paradise soon. But, you see, the European spirit with its logic is not heading to God but to the moon. Now you are behaving like a civil servant. Things are different in spiritual life. What is needed is simplicity. Act with simplicity and trust in God.

2. A well-known psychiatric hospital in Thessaloniki.

3. A collection of sixty-two hymnological canons (consisting of a series of odes) to the *Theotokos*. In 1796, Saint Nicodemos the *Haghiorite* published the *Theotokarion* after he diligently collected these canons from Holy Mountain manuscripts.

– How can I become simple, Geronda?

– I shall have to open your head and put an old-fashioned mind in it! You need to enter the simple world of the *Gerontikon*, and get to know the spiritual science which lifts and refreshes the soul, and gets rid of headaches. Logic will make us suffer. For example, I say to myself, "This must be done in this specific manner," and so I go ahead and do it because it has to be done. I don't do it with my heart but because logic dictates it. Logic and courtesy may tell me that "I must surrender my seat," but my heart will not. Think of the difference when my heart is moved and I surrender my seat out of love. I feel such joy!

We should keep the self out of our actions. We should not act for the sake of our own comfort. This will keep Christ away from us. We should act for the comfort of others, and this way we too shall be comforted. God will then find comfort in us and we will cease to be merely human; we shall become deified. But if we put only the mind in charge, everything will be carnal and human.

Secular logic tires the mind and weakens the body; it constricts the heart, while spiritual logic expands it. When used correctly, the mind can spur the heart and help it. When the mind enters the heart and the two work together, our work is not anymore the work of logic and reason. Sound reasoning is a gift. But this gift must be restored and sanctified.

– Geronda, I don't have a heart.

– You do have a heart, but as soon at it tries to act, your mind puts a muzzle on it. You must try to acquire the logic of the heart, faith and love.

– How can I achieve this?

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– The first step: go down town to Thessaloniki and march barefoot in protest, so that people will say that you went mad; this way you will get rid of your mind!!! Blessed soul! You approach everything with mathematical exactness. What are you, an astronomer? If you stop thinking logically, you will be able to start working spiritually on yourself.

– What should I study, Geronda, to help me get rid of secular logic?

– First you must read the *Gerontikon*, *Philotheos History*,[4] and *Evergetinos*.[5] All these books are practical not theoretical. Their simple patristic spirit and holiness will help you remove secular logic from your mind. Next, you should read Abba Isaac, and this way you will not see him as a philosopher, but as a man illumined by God.

Secular Logic Will Adulterate Our Spiritual Sense

The Holy Fathers saw everything with the spiritual, the divine eye. Patristic texts were written in the spirit of God and it was in the spirit of God that the Holy Fathers gave their interpretations. Today this spirit is lacking and Patristic texts are hard to understand. People see everything with secular eyes and cannot see beyond that; they do not have the breadth of spirit that results from faith and love. Arsenios the Great used to leave palm leaves in

4. Collection of instructive incidents and sayings of the monks and laity during the time of the early Church.

5. Well known anthology of ascetic and patristic sayings and incidents, which was compiled by the Monk Paul the Evergetinos, the founder of the famous Monastery of the *Theotokos Evergetithos* in Constantinople.

the water, without changing it, and the water would have a strong stench. It is beyond us today to understand what sprang from that unclean water![6] "But I don't understand that," we hear some people say. They do not take the time to see if there is something there; perhaps something they overlooked. They simply reject it because they do not understand it!

When logic gets involved, we will have a hard time understanding the Gospel and the Holy Fathers. Our spiritual sense is so altered, that our logic will prove the Gospel and the works of the Holy Fathers useless, and we will say things like, "All these years of asceticism and fasting have not done us any good!" This is blasphemy. Once, a young monk, who lived in a *Kelli*, came to my *Kalyvi* driving a car. "My son," I said, "why do you need this car? It doesn't fit a monk!" "Why, Geronda," he answered, "doesn't the Gospel say, *Will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life*?"[7] I replied, "When the Gospel says, *Will receive a hundredfold*, it refers to the things that a person needs. But the state that best fits the monk is what the Apostle Paul means when he describes Christians *as having nothing and yet possessing everything*.[8] In other words, the monk has no possessions but he has virtue and this is why people will trust him with their wealth. This does not mean that we monks should have

6. Abba Arsenios only changed the water for his palm leaves once a year; the rest of the time, he simply added to it. Some monks implored him in these words, "Why do you not change the water for these palm leaves when it smells bad?" He said to them, "Instead of the aromatic perfumes I once enjoyed in the world, I must now endure this unpleasant smell." *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Abba Arsenios*, p. 9:18.

7. Mt 19:29.

8. II Cor 6:10.

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possessions!" Do you see how logic can lead one to the wrong interpretation? You must always remember that if we are not purified, if divine illumination does not come to us, our interpretations will be muddled and obscure.

They asked me once, "Why didn't the *Panaghia* perform a miracle on the Island of Tenos to prevent the Italians from blowing up the Greek frigate *Ellis* on the day of Her feast?" Actually, the *Panaghia* performed a greater miracle on that day. The attack on *Ellis*[9] made the Greeks indignant, and once they realized that the Italians[10] would not respect anything, they went after them and kicked them out shouting "*aera*!"[11] Had the attack in Tenos not taken place, the Greeks might have thought, "The Italians are a religious people like us; they are our friends." They would not have realized the measure of their impiety. And now these people come with their logic and ask, "Why didn't the *Panaghia* perform a miracle?" What can I say?

Then, some will ask me "How do they know that the fire in Babylon was actually forty nine cubits high when they threw in the three Young Men; did they have it measured?" Since the fire was seven cubits high at first, and then they added more fuel to increase it to sevenfold, doesn't seven times seven make forty nine? Don't you feel like throwing such people into the fire? You see all this rationalism, this secular logic that is completely out of touch with reality. Some modern theologians will spend their time on such things. For example, they may

9. On 15 August 1940.

10. On 28 October 1940, Italy, fighting on the side of Nazi Germany, invaded Greece.

11. A battle cry of the Greek soldiers during World War II; it means literally "air" and metaphorically "get blown away".

ask, "Did the demons that fell into the sea survive or drown?"[12] If the important thing is that they left the man, why are you so concerned with what happened to them? Make sure that you don't get possessed yourself, and don't bother with where the demons are now!

– Geronda, some people are trying to reconcile the Gospel with human logic. They examine the Gospel with secular logic and cannot make any sense out of it.

– The Gospel and secular logic cannot be reconciled. In the Gospel there is love, while in secular logic there is self-interest. The Gospel says, *And if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two*.[13] Where is the logic here? This is straight madness! That is why those who try to reconcile the Gospel with secular logic find themselves in utter confusion. There are, for example, various charitable groups engaging in charitable work. They learn, for instance, that someone has suffered a great loss, a bankruptcy, and needs money. "Let's help him," they say, "but only after we verify that indeed he is in need." So, two or three of them will decide to visit his house to see if he is really in need. And let's say that they see, for example, that he has a luxurious dining set and they conclude, "Oh, these armchairs and dining set are so nice; if he has such expensive furniture, he cannot be in need." And they end up giving him nothing. What they don't understand is that this person may be hungry. When someone becomes poor, they don't change their clothes from one minute to another. There is no way of knowing that this dining set was not something he had from before

12. Cf. Mt 8:32.

13. Mt 5:41.

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and hasn't yet been able to sell it. Or, maybe someone who heard about the plight of the family gave it to them. They judge everything with logic and get confused, and they keep the Gospel out of their lives. People look at others from the outside (rather than from the heart), and for this reason they see them in the wrong light.

"Judging By Appearances" [14]

– Geronda, I feel that my judgment, my logic and my sense of human justice are an obstacle to my spiritual progress.

– Of course they are obstacles to your spiritual progress, because where they are present, God's Grace is absent. And then, we are left without divine assistance and we fall flat on our face. As a rule, human judgment and justice are unjust. God's justice is full of love, forbearance and forgiveness. The virus causing your spiritual disease is your tendency to examine things with human logic. The medicine that will cure you is good thoughts. When our thinking is on the right side and our thoughts are good, the capacity of our heart increases. You tend to use logic too much and for this reason you must be very careful with your thoughts, because the conclusions you reach based on logic are human and not spiritual and holy.

– Geronda, why do I criticize others so much?

– In your case, it's your law studies that should be blamed. Studies in a particular field or work in a particular profession will often cultivate in us a dry logic. Logic is the disease of intellectuals. It is inside their bone marrow.

14. Cf. Jn 7:24.

Even though you have a heart, you will still put logic ahead.

There are some people who have great capacity for logic and egotistical judgment; they will dismiss the views of everybody else. They expect absolute correctness from others but not from themselves. They are comfortable with their own weaknesses and eager to blame others. This is all very strange! These people are well-formed externally, but they have created a human being full of hypocrisy, without a trace of simplicity. This is the difference between Europeans and Greeks; and by "Greeks", I mean the Orthodox spirit. You can never figure out the right way to approach a European. He will always welcome you with a fake smile. But with a Greek it's different; you always know how he feels. Is he happy? He will show it. Is he upset? He will show it and this way you will know how to deal with him.

– Geronda, what's wrong when one passes judgment on people, things and situations, and actually does that very quickly?

– This happens when one's actions are based only on logic; only the mind works and it shows. It would be helpful if God were to take a screwdriver and turn it a little on these people. The more we empty our mind, the more we are filled with Grace. The less logic, the more Grace. When I say mind, I mean human judgment, egoism and self-confidence. From the moment we acknowledge that we may not have the right judgment and say, "I risk making mistakes because my judgment is secular and lacks divine illumination; I should stop using it," God will enlighten us, and make us more discriminating and capable of discerning right from wrong.

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The Tempter makes intelligent people useless because it leads them to judge things by their appearances. When man has only the human element in his nature, he will judge in human terms and even commit crimes. Once the human element is removed, his judgment can become divine. A secular judgment is a wrong judgment. We witness so many injustices! People are tempted and scandalized all the time! That is why you must always invite the good thoughts, to ensure a good state for your soul. Man is such a mystery; it's so difficult to know his inner self, to know what he is thinking!

Once, on the Day of *Pascha*, after the Divine Liturgy, we stopped for a while at a *Kalyvi,* to eat cheese and eggs. I noticed that the monk sitting next to me, whose job was to transport wood, was not eating what was offered to him but was putting it aside. "Eat," I said to him. "All right, I will," he replied. But I saw that he was not eating anything. "Eat," I said again, "today is *Pascha.*" "Bless me, Father," he replied, "but when I receive Holy Communion I do not eat; at two o'clock, I will eat." He had not eaten since the day before and he would not eat again till the afternoon! Do you see what he did out of piety and devotion? And the others may have thought that he was only a simple transporter of wood.

Man is a mystery! Now, when you are asked to pass judgment on something or someone, you must stop and think, "Is this judgment a divine judgment or is it filled with passion?" That is to say, is our judgment disinterested, or is it self-serving? You should not trust yourselves or your judgment. When we judge others, we are full of egoism. I am often asked to judge a situation and I end up doing it against my will; well, even though in the end

I judge selflessly and impartially, when I go to pray, the sweetness that I usually feel when I pray, is not there. This is not because my conscience bothers me over something, but simply because I judged as a man. Now imagine how I would feel if the judgment were wrong and justified on human grounds alone! Judgment is a very serious matter. It belongs to God. It is dreadful! The good intentions of the person passing the judgment do not matter really. What matters, is the outcome.

We need to have discernment at all times. Naturally, all of us have some, but, unfortunately, most of us will not use it on ourselves but on others (so that they will not appear better than we are). Thus, we pollute our discernment with judgments, criticisms and demands that others must correct themselves, when we should only demand improvement of our self. For we are the ones who are not taking the spiritual struggle seriously; we are not putting an end to the rule of our passions, so that our soul may be set free and fly toward Heaven.

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His message

First we believe in God and then we love God and His image, the man. Faith increases with prayers. "Add us faith".

"As i have realised all evil comes from unfaithfulness. When someone doesn't believe in God he wants to have fun. So he falls into every kind of sin".

"People must understand the deepest meaning of life that is, that this life is given to prepare us for the future life. The people must find a guide, a religius guide, as the ones who need a guide when they travels. Then with the help of the religius guide people will programme their life, with a little study, a little prayer and avoiding the causes of sin and the wordly thinking which is the worst of all. So their heart will be devoted to Christ".

"We must wrestle with mettle to save ourselves and not to pain Christ. Christ will tell us "My child i have done so many things to save you. I have shed my blood and i have gone through passion, what have you done to save yourself?"

"Each person must find his inclination. The hard-working person, either in married life or in monastic, will be successful".

"We should prefer sadness and accept it more than we accept happiness. The bitter medicine is usually better than the sweet because it cures. Real happiness springs from pain".

"What prevents people from succeding in his spiritual life is the fact that he uses his brain not to improve his spiritual life but to do other things".

"We must feel the pain for our present state to be able to pray with all our heart".

"Now it is the time to seperate the kids from the lambs, the faithful fom the unfaithful. Later there will be time when we take examinations and suffer persecation for our faith and copper will be separated from gold".

"When somebody is troubled because he suffers for other, cares for other, makes their problems his own problems then he will get the pay of a martyr. How lovely are the people who sacrifice everything! They don't have any problems and their face shines because they are filled with God's joy".

"The basis of our spiritual life is to think of the others first and then of ourselves. When we get into the others place and understand them then we are related to Christ".

"God's grace is an expensive thing. It must find the person who spiritually agrees with God to come and stay in his heart. And of course the person must work hard to get it, while we want God's grace to come and release us from weaknesses without struggling for it".

"It takes lots of sacrifice, self denial, modesty mettle to make the Holy Ghost come and stay in people's hearts. Spiritual life isn't enjoyment. Christ has put the plug but our wires are rusty and they don't get God's grace. We should remove the rust from our wires, struggle to know ourselves, stop passions and get the virtues to make God's grace visit us".

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